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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study are to compare school and non-school acquisition of knowledge as perceived by Australian and American elementary school children, and to determine if children acquire more knowledge about their own country than foreign children do. A total of 156 American 5th and 6th graders and 100 Australian 6th and 7th year students from similar suburban communities answered 50 multiple choice questions on events, location, culture, economics, politics, people, and geography of Australia and the United States. Students also indicated whether they believed they had gained their knowledge in or outside of school. Findings indicate that American children had significantly greater knowledge about the United States than Australian children did, and vice versa. Moreover, neither group perceived a difference between school and non-school acquisition of knowledge. These results suggest that social studies knowledge may be acquired through non-school activities. A broadening of children's environment over the years due to travel and technology is also indicated. The report concludes with four tables of data. (LP)

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A Comparison of School and Non School Selected Knowledge Acquisition as Perceived by Elementary School Children of Australia and The United States

About The Authors

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A COMPARISON OF SCHOOL AND NON SCHOOL SELECTED KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AS PERCEIVED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN OF AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

Recent renewed interest in global education is reflected by curriculum revision projects, teacher in-service programs and attention given to the topic in professional journals and at professional meetings. Individuals and groups advocating that more attention be given to global education in school programs assume that elementary and secondary school students should be knowledgable about nations of the world. Few would debate the importance of including understanding of world cultures in elementary and secondary school curriculum. However, as with most curriculum revision projects, there is a danger of assuming that all learning takes place in school and little is being done in areas such as global education. This writer feels that there is a need to give attention to what students learn through non school experiences and coordinate these learnings with ongoing educational programs of the school as well as curriculum revision projects. Often pre-tests over selected topics, include only items that test the content a teacher plans to present in a unit of instruction. Pre-tests should be expanded to include items that determine non school experiences students have had that are related to the topic of study that may or may not be a part of the content a teacher plans to present.

Since the mid sixties much criticism has been launched toward the "Expanding Horizons" approach to social studies. This approach advocates that study should be sequenced from the child's most immediate environments in early grades (self, home, neighborhood) and be expanded to larger remote environments (state, nation, hemisphere and world) in later grades. One major point of criticism toward this model is that today's child has experienced, through technology (i.e. television) and travel a much broader environment at a much earlier age. Even though this

criticism has existed little has been done to develop alternative models that have a sound rationale. This is evidenced by current social studies programs of elementary schools and is also reflected in the social studies programs being marketed by commercial publishing companies.

The assumption that environments of children are broader at an earlier age as compared to the past is sound, based on the impact of communication technology and travel. However, we cannot assume that learning does take place through travel and the use of technology or make assumptions about what is learned without extensive research which there is little of at both a national and international level. On an international level this study provides some insight regarding the impact of non school experiences upon the acquisition of social studies knowledge by elementary school children in Australia and the United States.

Purpose Of The Study

This study was designed to compare non school acquisition of selected knowledge with school acquisition of the same knowledge as perceived by elementary school children of Australia and the United States. The study was also designed to determine if Australian children had acquired more selected knowledge about Australia than United States children had, and to determine if United States elementary school children had acquired more knowledge about the United States than Australian children had. To satisfy the purposes of the study, the following four null hypotheses were tested:

1. At the .05 level there is no significant difference in selected knowledge acquired about the United States by United States elementary school children as compared to Australian elementary school children.

2. At the .05 level there is no significant difference in selected acquired knowledge about Australia by Australiar elementary school children as compared to United States elementary school children.

3. At the .05 level there is no significant difference in the acquisition of selected knowledge about Australia through school experiences as compared to non school experiences as perceived by elementary school children of the United States.

4. At the .05 level there is no significant difference in the acquisition of selected knowledge about the United States through school experiences as compared to non school experiences as perceived by elementary school children of Australia.

Population Of The Study

The United States population of the study consisted of 156 fifth and sixth grade students of Hamlow Elementary School, Waverly, Nebraska. Waverly is a suburb of Lincoln, Nebraska with many of its inhabitants commuting to Lincoln for employment and services not normally found in suburban communities. Parents of the students range from semi skilled workers to professionals. The 156 children included all fifth and sixth grade students attending Hamlow Elementary School. Therefore, a wide range of academic ability was represented.

The Australian population consisted of 100 students in year six and year seven (equivalent to fifth and sixth grade) attending Flinders Park School in South Australia. Flinders Park is a suburb of Adelaide, South Australia and is considered a part of the Adelaide Metropolitan area. As with the United States population, the children represented a wide range of academic ability and their parents were employed in a range from semi skilled to professional positions.

The Flinders Park School social studies curriculum for year six and seven did not provide for a separate unit of study on the United States, Therefore, through current affairs and topics of study the Australian children had incidental experiences in school that related to knowledge about the United

States. The Hamlow Elementary School social studies program for grades five and six did not include a separate unit on Australia and similar to the Flinders Park School program the children were limited tc incidental experiences through their school program.

The demographic data collected displayed that most children in Australia and in the United States watched television, attended movie theaters, read magazines, listened to the radio, read books from the public libraries on a regular basis and had travel experiences with their families. In general, both groups of children had been engaged in a variety of non school activities that may have helped them acquire knowledge about the United States and Australia.

Data Collection

To collect data for the study, an instrument was developed which contained twenty-five multiple choice questions about Australia and twenty-five multiple choice questions about the United States. Each question contained four choices with 36 of the choices being correct responses for each set of twenty-five questions. Australian and United States students were requested to respond to all fifty questions. Also, for each question related to United States knowledge, the Australian students were requested to indicate if they felt they acquired the knowledge in their school environment or outside of school through activities such as watching television, reading magazines, going to the movies, travel with parents and similar activities. The United States students were requested to provide the same information regarding the twenty-five questions related to knowledge about Australia.

The fifty questions and choices provided in the instrument were designed to test knowledge about the United States and Australia in a contemporary and historical sense. The questions were related to the concepts of; location,

culture, economic systems, political structure, events, people, physical land features and natural resources. For each question related to knowledge about one of the two countries, a similar question related to the other was provided. The following is an example:

. The first president of the United States was 1) Mark Spitz 2) George Washington 3) Sir Edmund Barton 4) Admiral Byrd

. The first prime minister of Australia was 1) Murray Rose 2) Sir Edmund Barton 3) George Washington 4) Gregory Blaxland

The instrument was pilot tested with Australian and United States children similar in age and socio economic background to the population of the study. As a result of the findings from the pilot test the wording of some questions and the directions for taking the test were modified. The instrument was administered to the children included in this study by their regular classroom teachers and the children were given unlimited time to respond to each item on the instrument.

Results of The Study

The first and second null hypotheses of the study were concerned with determining if Australian elementary school children had a greater knowledge of their own country than United States elementary school children and if United States children had a greater knowledge of their country than Australian children. As displayed in Tables 1 and 2, through analysis of variance, it was found that a strong level of significant difference was attained for the first and second hypotheses. At the .001 level it was found that United States elementary school children had acquired a greater knowledge of the United States (M= 24.74) than Australian children (M= 20,69). Also, at the .001 level it was found that Australian elementary school children had acquired a greater knowledge of their

country (M= 22.22) than United States children (M= 17.69). Therefore, the first and second null hypotheses were rejected.

Tables 1 and 2 about here.

The findings presented in Tables 1 and 2 are not surprising since one would expect that elementary school children would have greater knowledge of their own country than children of another country would have. However, some have implied that through school studies of the United States, children from other countries may know more about the United States than children that are US citizens. The findings of this study would suggest that the assumption is false.

The third and fourth null hypotheses of the study were concerned with comparing school and non school experiences in the acquisition of selected knowledge about Australia and the United States. The data presented in Tables 3 and 4 displayed the results for analysis of variance. This data indicates that the United States elementary school children perceived no difference in their non school (M= 9.82) acquisition of knowledge about Australia as compared to their school acquisition (M= 8.090) of the same knowledge. Also, the Australian children of the study did not perceive a difference in their school acquisition (M= 12.560) of selected knowledge about the United States as compared to their non school (M= 12.000) acquisition of the same knowledge. Therefore, at the .05 level, the third and fourth null hypotheses were accepted.

Tables 3 and 4 about here.

The findings related to hypotheses three and four are very revealing. Based on the perceptions of children in this study, non school experiences related to knowledge of a foreign country appear to produce as much learning as school

experiences. However, one should be cautious in over generalizing these findings. This is but one sampling of children from two different countries. Also, if the Australian children had recently completed a school unit of study on the United States and the United States children had recently completed a unit of study on Australia, perhaps the third and fourth null hypotheses of this study would have been rejected. Further research with other populations is needed as well as determining if the perceptions of children regarding where they learn knowledge is valid.

Summary

This study was concerned with a comparison of school and non school selected knowledge acquisition as perceived by elementary school children of Australia and the United States. Through the development and administration of an instrument designed to test the acquisition of selected knowledge about the United States and Australia as well as measure student perceptions in terms of school and non school acquisition of knowledge, it was found that:

- United States children had acquired more knowledge about the United States than had Australian children.
- Australian children had acquired more knowledge about Australia than had United States children.
- United States elementary school children perceived no significant difference in their acquisition of selected knowledge about Australia through school experiences as compared to non school experiences.
- Australian elementary school children perceived no significant difference in their acquisition of selected knowledge about the

United States through school experiences as compared to non school experiences.

Most would readily agree that environments of children are broader than in the past as a result of travel and communication technology. The findings of this study suggest that social studies knowledge about other countries may be acquired through non school activities. The implications of this study are that there is a need for further research in the area of non school learning and the development of curriculum planning models that take into account techniques for the integration of school learning activities with non school learning activities.

Table 1.

A Comparison Of Acquired Selected Knowledge About The United States Between Elementary School Children of The United States And Australia (N= 256)

Source Of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	1002.5223	1	1002.5222	29.149***
Within Groups	8735.7937	254	34.3929	
Total	9738.3125	255		

***p$\lesssim$0.001

Table 2.

A Comparison Of Acquired Selected Knowledge About Australia Between Elementary School Children Of The United States And Australia

(N= 256)

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Between Groups	1208.6392	1	1208.6392	37.442***
Within Groups	8199.2639	254	32.2806	
Total	9407.9023	255		

***$p < 0.001$

Table 3.

The Acquisition Of Selected Knowledge About Australia Through School Experiences As Compared To Non School Experiences As Perceived By Elementary School Children Of The United States

(N= 156)

Source Of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Main Effects	42.739	1	42.739	1.366***
Explained	42.742	1	42.742	1.366***
Residual	4817.941	154	31.285	
Total	4860.684	155	31.359	

***p> 0.05

Table 4.

The Acquisition Of Selected Knowledge About The United States Through School Experiences As Compared To Non School Experiences As Perceived By Elementary School Children Of Australia

(N= 100)

Source Of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Main Effects	28.720	1	28.720	0.903***
Explained	28.720	1	28.720	0.903***
Residual	3115.859	98	31.794	
Total	3144.579	99	31.763	

***p> 0.05